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Shakespeare's Love Story



ANNA BONINGTON MAC MAHAN



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SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

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SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS GIFT TO
QUEEN BESS

FLORENCE IN THE POETRY OF THE
BROWNING'S

WITH SHELLEY IN ITALY

WITH BYRON IN ITALY

WITH WORDSWORTH IN ENGLAND

A. C. McCLURG & Co., PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO



SHAKESPEARE'S COURTSHIP

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

1580—1609

BY

ANNA BENNESON McMAHAN

With twenty-six illustrations



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.
1909

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D E D I C A T I O N

To D. E. B.

*“If any should be curious to discover
Whether to you I am a friend or lover,
Let him read Shakespeare’s sonnets, taking thence
A whetstone for their dull intelligence.”*

—SHELLEY

*“With this same key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart.”*

—WORDSWORTH

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“TO THE GREAT VARIETY OF READERS”

THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO THIS day, on May the twentieth, sixteen hundred and nine, there was entered on the Stationer's Register “a book called Shakespeare's Sonnettes.” To whom these sonnets were written, — whether to one person or to many different persons; why they were written, — whether as expressions of personal feeling or as flights of poetic fancy; in what order they were composed; how the publisher got hold of them, no one knew then, and no one has since discovered. But that the book was printed without the author's supervision was plain, and that it was without his permission seemed probable. It could not have been immediately popular, since it was thirty-one years before the issue of a second edition. The publisher's preface to this describes the sonnets as “seren, cleere and elegantly plaine,” and for a hundred years this statement passed undisputed. But toward the close of the eighteenth century the critics and commentators began to busy themselves, and to torture out of

F O R E W O R D

these one hundred and fifty-four poems all manner of hidden meanings, most of them being of little credit to the poet.

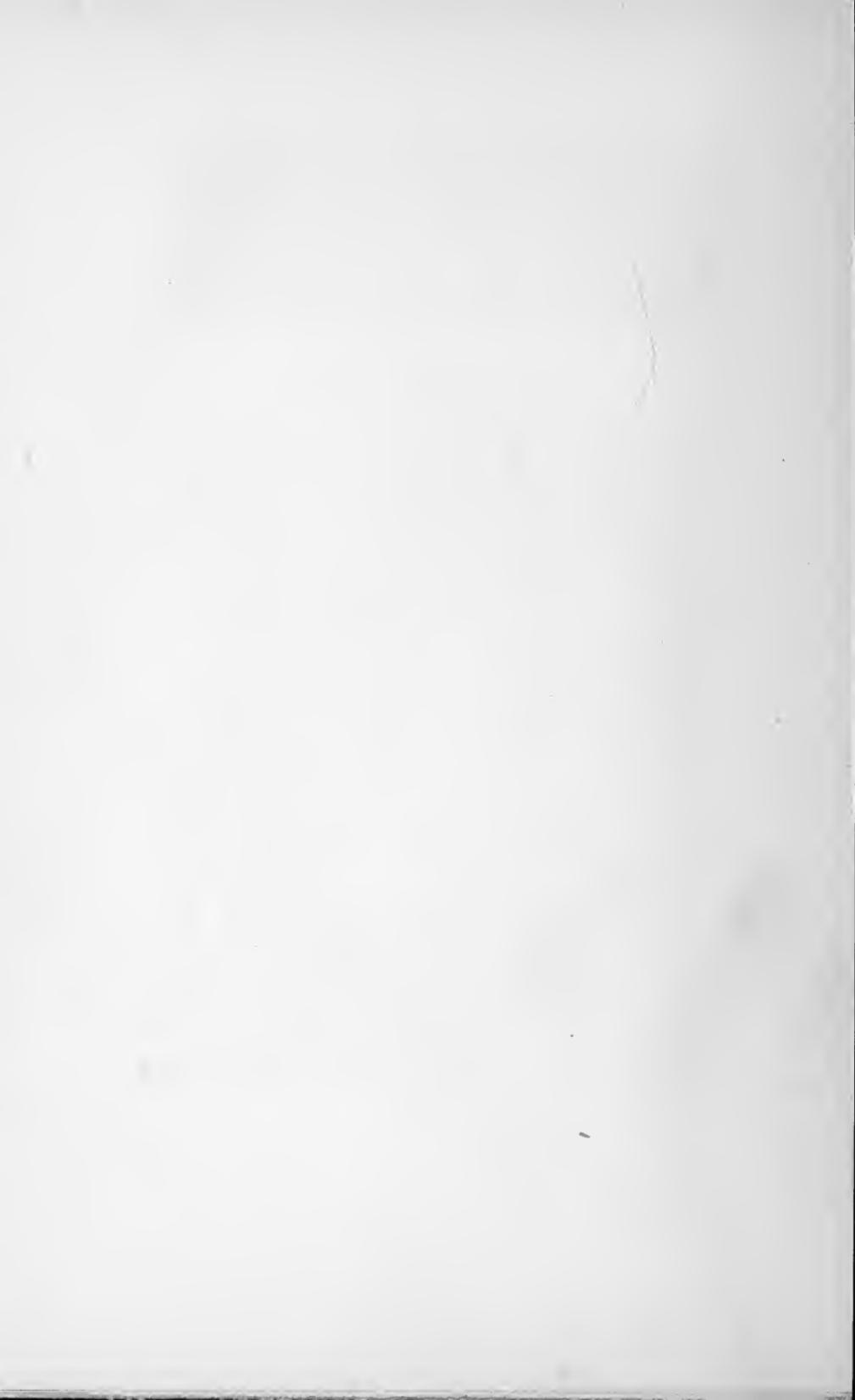
Fear not, long-suffering Readers, that another "theory" awaits you, to be added to the vast bulk of sonnet discussion. I ask, on this tercentenary of the first announcement of Shakespeare's Sonnets, only the privilege of taking a few of them out of their arbitrary setting by the original publisher and of placing them between the lines of some of the pages that we know of Shakespeare's life. Read them as you would any other poems, according to their simplest and most obvious meaning, and grant thereby that Shakespeare was not only the mightiest of poets, but the most devoted and inspired of lovers.

MAY THE TWENTIETH
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINE

I

AT ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

*“Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper'd with love's sighs.”*
— LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST





CHAPTER ONE



THE OLD THATCH-roofed cottage of Richard Hathaway, yeoman of Shottery, shelters its own secret, in this year of our Lord, 1580,—a secret which, sooner or later, enters beneath all roofs where maidens dwell. Fair of face, sweet of speech, tender of heart, Anne Hathaway could not fail to learn it. In walks through quiet Shottery lanes, bordered by hedges of blooming hawthorn, it has been whispered in her ear; in gay village festivals, where young and old have joined in merry sport and dance,

it has been told by the warm pressure of the hand; on the wooden seat by the old chimney-place, it has been revealed to her by a silence more eloquent than words. But more than all, and beyond all precious, are the little slips of paper on which the secret is written,—small slips indeed, fourteen lines only on each, hidden away from every curious eye, where none but Anne may find and none but Anne may read. That they are all on one theme makes, not mars, their worth; for it is the theme to which the hearts of maidens have thrilled and answered since time began; a theme the most simple yet also the most complex that anywhere exists—the theme, “I love you.” Like the closely folded petals of the rose, each one differs somewhat from any other, each is needful to the perfect whole, all bend in homage to the sweet centre whence comes their life. The village

maiden only partly knows, what we now wholly grant, that never before has love found more glorious speech, never before has the great theme been set to lines which so run over with poetry and turn to music on the tongue. Too unlettered to analyze or compare, her spirit yet responds to their charm, and, like one set apart and supremely blessed among women, she treasures these little slips, has read and reread them until she needs to read them no more, so deeply graven are they in her memory. She might, indeed, destroy the mere papers, for the sonnets are written in letters of light on her mind. Each is dated, but no dates are needed, for they tell their own story. In the earlier ones the boyish handwriting reveals the writer's youth. But although taken from school prematurely to help in earning the family bread, he has been learning



ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE
FROM THE BROOK

things far better than penmanship, and now at eighteen Will Shakespeare is, as all his Stratford neighbors grant, already a man in looks and bearing. Why this is so they do not fully understand, for his real life is lived too far apart from theirs. On the streets they know him well—this eldest son of the respected but unfortunate John Shakespeare—buying and selling, weighing and measuring, busy about all the little details of the business of the woollen



THE INTERIOR
OF ANNE HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

trade. What they do not know, and would little esteem if they did, is that along with this there is an inner life — a life of dreams and visions, both his own and other men's as he finds them in books. He is revelling in the stirring events of Greek and Roman history, in poetry and fiction, in the long-spun details of honest chroniclers, in the wonders of romance, in legends of popular minstrelsy, in songs and ballads, in tales of that southern land

of Italy, where hearts beat faster and love and jealousy are fiercer and lead to more tragic ends than in everyday England. Moreover, from that same Italy, two noble Englishmen have lately brought a new form of verse—"three four-fold strands of poesy, caught up and dexterously wound into a perfect circle by two shining threads of gold"—so the new verse form is described. Difficult of composition indeed, yet recognized by every young poet as the fittest and sweetest medium for the expression of delicate feeling. Edmund Spenser is wooing his Elizabeth in the *Amoretti Sonnets*; Philip Sidney is telling a tragic tale of passion struggling with adverse fate, but mastered at last by high resolve, in his *Astrophel and Stella*; and William Shakespeare, though the world knows it not, is adding to this great sonnet era its brightest and most imperishable gems.



THE WALK THROUGH WEIR BRAKE



Already of “imagination all compact,” it matters little that he has left the Grammar School at the age of thirteen, knowing “small Latin and less Greek.” He drinks now from richer founts of learning. Old books, mostly translations from the French or Latin, fall in his way. In one he reads the goodly history of Romeo and Giulietta; in another the story of the rich heiress who chose a husband by the device of a gold, a silver, and a leaden casket; the story of the merchant whose hard-hearted creditor required the fulfilment of his bond by cutting a pound of flesh from nearest the heart; the story of the Emperor Theodosius who had three daughters—two who said they loved him more than themselves, and one who said she loved him so much as he was worthy. And the two who professed most were unkind to him; but the other was the true daughter

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

and cared for him in his need and when deserted by all others.

At Billesley Hall, easily reached on a half holiday, is the rich store of books owned by his kinsman, Thomas Trussell. The old *Chronicles* delight him, less for their facts than for the soul struggles to be read between the lines. Single sentences lay hold upon him and kindle his imagination. He reads of one king who, "crowned and anointed by the spirituality, honored and exalted by the nobility, obeyed and worshipped of the common people, was suddenly deceived by them which he most trusted, betrayed by them whom he had preferred, and slain by them whom he had brought up and nourished"; of another whose "wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a Queen."

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

But oftenest sought and longest lingered over are those "Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans," lately brought from the French into eloquent English. Here, indeed, are annals after his own heart; annals more concerned with character than with events, noble deeds told in noble language. In backward looking vision he conjures wonderful scenes in

"The most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell," —

portraits such as that of

"Proud Cleopatra, when she met her Roman,
And Cydnus swell'd above the banks, or for
The press of boats, or pride."

On Sundays, from the Bible reading in the church, he stores away in memory tales of moving pathos or striking incident, such as The Prodigal Son, Jacob and Laban, Lazarus and Dives, and others like unto them. On winter

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

nights he creeps in unnoticed by the old gossips at the fireside to listen to their weird tales and ghostly fables

"Of woful ages long ago betid."

And so, with mind full and running over with stories of wonderful combats, of courageous knights, of noble dames, of chaste and constant ladies, of puissant princes, he too must needs express himself. He too will write a sonnet; he too will choose a lady fair as Petrarch chose his Laura, as the Earl of Surrey his Geraldine. To her will he sing all the thoughts and feelings that fill his breast, and she will read and remember and rejoice.

One and one only fills his mind's eye and wins his heart's love. That she is seven years older than himself matters not. Indeed, is it not always so with a first love? Is it not ever the woman



EDMUND SPENSER, THE CHIEF POET OF HIS TIME



somewhat ripe in years that answers to its ideal?

The sweet thoughts easily shape themselves into verse, but long days pass before the opportunity comes to slip it into the hand of Anne Hathaway, for the poet is shy, as befits his years. But come it does at last. It is a spring morning and, according to the pretty English custom, all the young people have turned out to "do observance to the morn of May." Most of them have spent the night in the woods, in dances and in games, and now return in procession, each bearing birch boughs, branches of trees or garlands, and following the big Maypole drawn by thirty yoke of oxen, every horn tipped with a bright nosegay. But when fun and feasting are over, and Anne Hathaway turns her steps homeward at the twilight hour, a paper is pressed into her hand and she reads:



SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE, BEFORE
ITS RESTORATION

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights ;
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing.
For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to
praise.



OLD COTTAGES
AT WELFORD-ON-AVON

Of the thoughts of the village maiden,
of her dreams that night, who shall tell?
But that, henceforth, she too abides in
the ideal world, who shall doubt? For
those who once enter therein there are
no surprises, nothing is too strange or
too glorious for belief. Days follow,
but how different from all former days!
Spinning, weaving, baking, malting,
brewing — each prosaic task is glorified
by the little paper worn next her heart.
But when night falls, every duty done,

the five younger children snugly tucked away in bed, comes at last the quiet hour which Anne may claim as her very own—hour set apart and sacred to the hopes, the dreams, the visions which will not bear the light of day. This glowing verse—is it truly written for her, and her alone, or is it perchance (cruel thought!) merely a poetic fancy born of books and not of feeling? Will the handsome youth, already a man in looks though not in years, put these thoughts into speech at their next meeting? Not yet; but though the lover may not venture to approach his mistress, he may place flowers on her doorstep; through them will he speak:

The forward violet thus did I chide ;
Sweet thief, whence did thou steal thy sweet
that smells,
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.
The lily I condemned for thy hand,



S.
STRATFORD-ON-AVON FROM WEIR BRAKE



SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair;
A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;
But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth,
A vengeful canker eat him up to death.

More flowers I noted, yet I none could see,
But sweet or color it had stol'n from thee.

Weeks pass; weeks of suspense and misery to Anne. Rumor tells her of wild pranks among the Stratford youth, Will Shakespeare's name being always among the ringleaders. Stories come to her ears of a drinking bout at Bidford, wherein the Stratford boys being worsted, start for home, but can go no further than a certain crabtree by the roadside, where they all fall down and lie in drunken sleep until morning; stories of strolling players with reputations none too good, who have such an attraction for John Shakespeare's son that he follows them from place to place

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

to the great neglect of his father's business; stories of hawking, hunting, poaching, horse racing, which fill the worse than idle hours.

The springtime wanes and the poet is silent. Has love waned too? Believe it not; summer has its own message:

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;

I love not less, though less the show appear;
That love is merchandized whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere.

Our love was new, and then but in the spring
When I was wont to greet it with my lays,
As Philomel, in summer's front doth sing
And stops her pipe, in growth of riper days;
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the
night,

But that wild music burthens every bough
And sweets grown common lose their dear
delight.

Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my
tongue

Because I would not dull you with my song.

But such reserve is not for long, nor is the written word enough. Soon meetings are planned; many a tryst is held among the woodland paths of Weir Brake; many are the walks over Borden Hill, "where the wild thyme blows," or along the banks of the Avon, where "willows grow aslant the stream" and where the level meadows are fringed with purple loose-strife, yellow iris, and blue forget-me-not. More and more, feeling breaks through reserve; the youth pours into sympathetic ears the story of his hopes, his fears, his discouragements, his ambitions. He confesses his longing to travel to the great city of London, there to try his fortune as poet; his hope some day to become a part of the great world with its wit and wisdom, its big events and heroic actions; his intention to compose a long poem in a new manner, reading now and then a stanza from that *Venus and*



OLD COTTAGE
AT WELFORD-ON-AVON

Adonis which, years afterward, he is to publish as the “first heir of his invention.”

“Never durst poet touch a pen to write
Until his ink were temper’d with love’s sighs”

is a truth born of the writer’s own experience. More and more impassioned becomes his utterance :

Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
Even those that said I could not love you dearer;
Yet then my judgment knew no reason why



A VILLAGE FESTIVAL

*"I will not give my part of this
sport, for a pension of thousands."*

—Twelfth Night

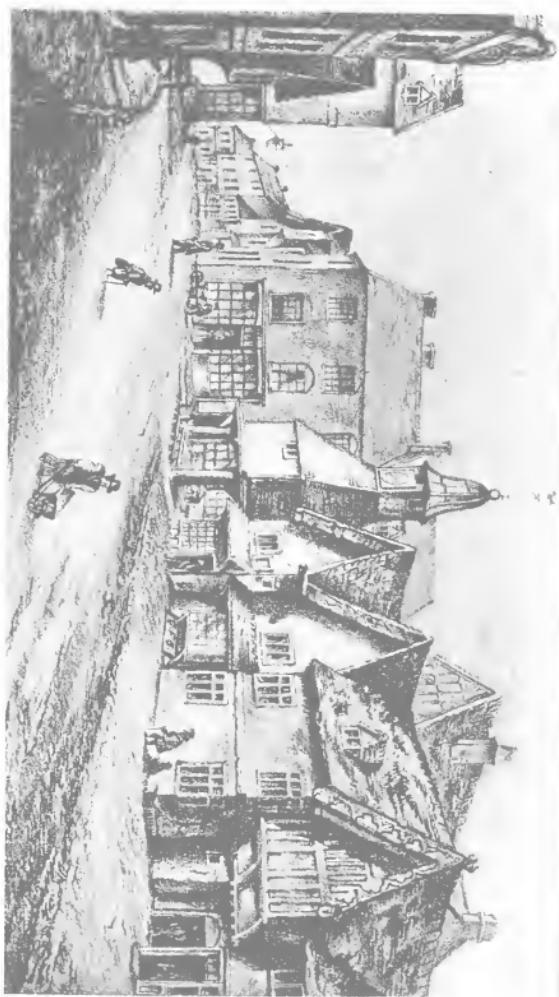
My most full flame should afterwards burn clearer.

But reckoning time, whose million'd accidents Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings, Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents, Divert strong minds to the course of altering things;

Alas, why, fearing of time's tyranny Might I not then say, "Now, I love you best" When I was certain o'er uncertainty, Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?

Love is a babe; then might I not say so,
To give full growth to that which still doth grow?

But now a shadow obscures the beautiful dream, Anne's conscience stirs. Her small Warwickshire world, as she knows but too well, will take merely a prosaic and practical view. Heads will wag disapprovingly, tongues will sting with bitter words, some will find in this matter food for merry jest and laughter. Hard as it is, Anne's resolve is taken; she meets her lover, tenderly reminds him of the reasons which must and ought to separate them, especially of their difference in years. Sad is the parting in the old garden, but, the cruel ordeal over, with conscience appeased, Anne retires to rest. But who shall wonder if the morning finds her at the old trysting place, so full of tender memories? Surely, she may yet take this small consolation without blame. And there behold! a fresh paper, the ink hardly yet dry upon it:



MARKET CROSS, STRATFORD-ON-AVON, FROM A PRINT DATED 1820



SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters
 cold
Have from the forests shook three summers'
 pride:—

Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn
 turn'd.

In process of the seasons have I seen
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.
Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,
Steal from his figure and no pace perceived;
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth
 stand,

Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived;
For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred,
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

Thus boldly, thus resisting all denial,
stifling all objections, pleading as man
never plead before, the young Shakespeare won his way. The joy of lov-
ing has been great, but the joy of being
beloved is even greater. His spirit is
tuned to finer issues; wild frolic and
unseemly carousal delight no more.

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

Field and forest are dear to him still, not for chase and sport, but because he finds there things like unto the drama of his own soul. Quiet, midland streams suggest the course of his own true love; in their soft murmur he hears "a gentle kiss to every sedge he overtaketh in his pilgrimage."

Long afterwards, when he writes of the "uncertain glory of an April day," of the "sun gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy," of the "canker in the fragrant rose," of autumn

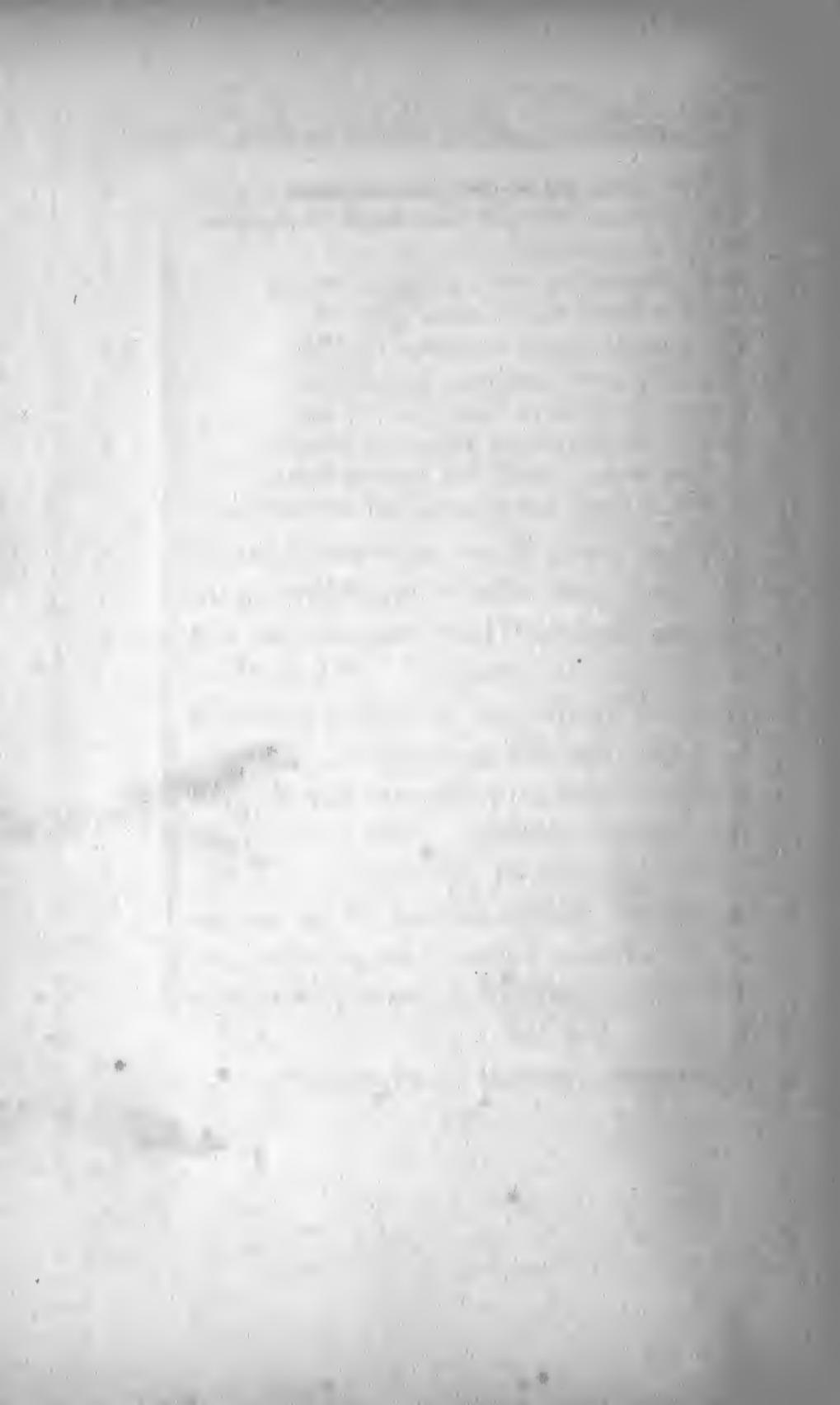
"When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,"

memory is only speaking the language he is now learning, reviving scenes which now become vital in his life. The joy of a love requited as well as bestowed now finds speech:

Let those who are in favor with their stars
Of public honor and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,



THE LATIN ROOM AT STRATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL



SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

Unlook'd for, joy in that I honor most.
Great princes' favorites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories, once foiled,
Is from the book of honor razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled.

Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove, nor be removed.

Then began those experiences which the youth was after to crystallize in his famous line, —“The course of true love never did run smooth.” The death of Richard Hathaway in July transferred to Anne, the eldest daughter, the duty to shield and care for the mother and the younger children. The pride of the Shakespeares of Stratford and the Ardens of Wilmcote took ill the notion of an alliance between their eldest son and the daughter of the humble Shottery farmer. But the youth brooked no interference, parental or otherwise:



CLOPTON BRIDGE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON
BUILT IN THE XV CENTURY

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no ! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken ;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth 's unknown, although his height
be taken.
Love 's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come ;
Love alters not with its brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out, even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.



OLD RECTORY
AT ALVESTON, WARWICKSHIRE

Thus was it that Shakespeare wooed and won his bride for their troth plighting—a solemn ceremony with exchange of rings and joining of hands, a kiss given and returned in the presence of witnesses, the real marriage in fact. Three months more, and the wedding day has arrived. Fair and clear, though frosty, is the November air as the merry party starts from the Shottery cottage across the fields and by winding roads to the little church at Luddington. The

bride, clad in a gown of sheep's russet with a kirtle of fine worsted, her hair curiously plaited and bound with golden fillets, is attended by two graceful boys with bride laces tied about their silken sleeves and scattering rosemary in her path. Before them is borne a silver-gilt bride cup hung about with ribbons of many colors; after them follow musicians; then a group of maidens, some carrying great bride cakes, others garlands of wheat finely gilded. As they reach the last turn of the road, fore-riders announce the approach of the bridegroom and his train. First are the pipers playing a festive tune; then the bridegroom with two young maidens attending; next a crowd of villagers, shouting, clapping their hands, and tossing their caps in air.

At the church the ceremony at the altar is but short. Afterward all drink from the gilt bowl and salute the bride,



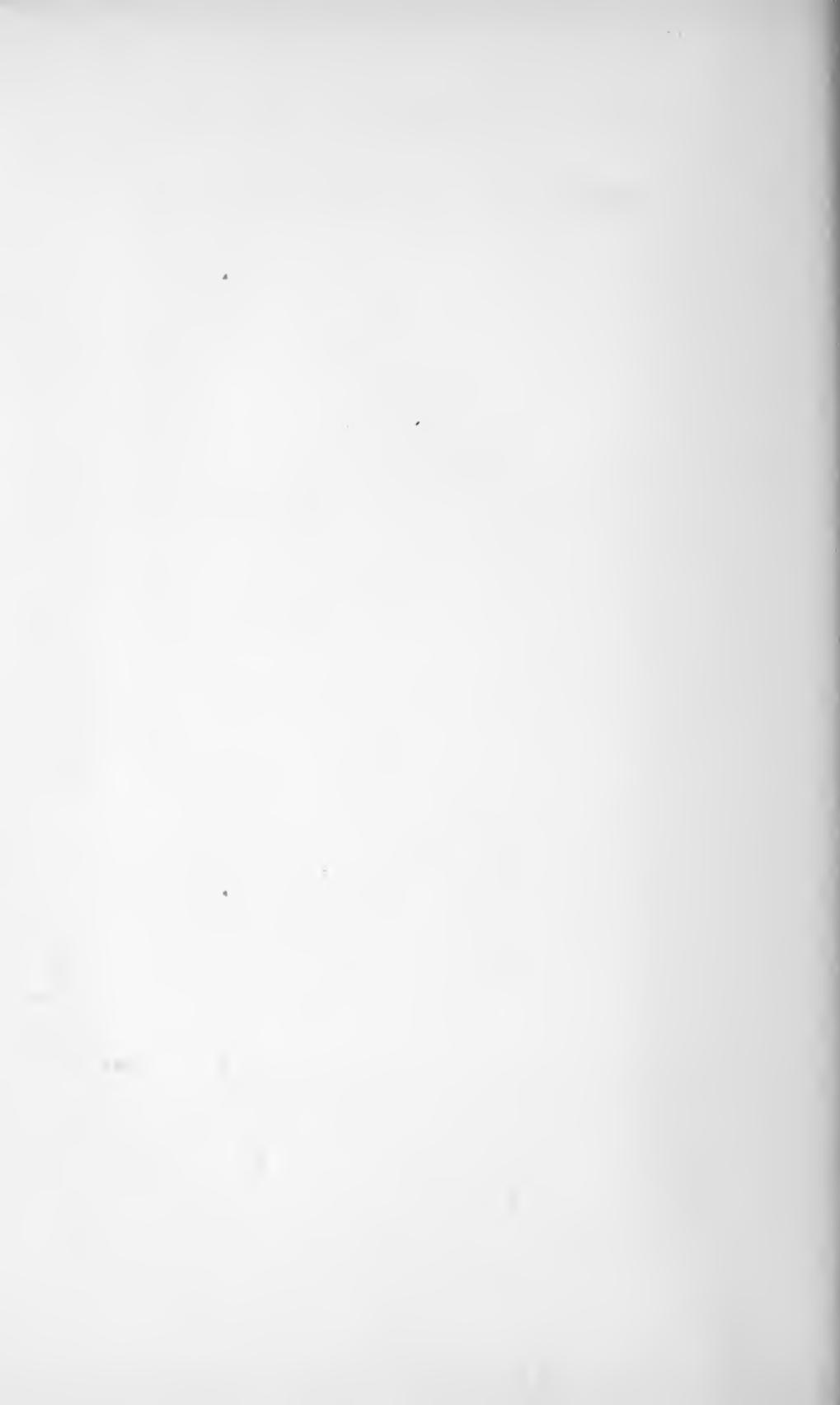
A LETTER FROM LONDON

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

while four young men mount fleet horses and contend with each other for the prize which awaits the one who first reaches home with the good news. Many were the lads that day that envied Will Shakespeare his good fortune; none, looking upon the bonny pair, found aught for wonder or for blame in a marriage blessed by so much beauty, constancy, and romance.



ANNE SHAKESPEARE AND HER FIRST-BORN



II

IN LONDON

“O, know, sweet love, I always write of you.”

— SONNET LXXVI



CHAPTER TWO



O TRUE LOVE story ends with the wedding day; Anne Hathaway the maiden lost no charm as Anne Shakespeare the mother of the three little ones that came to bless the simple home.

But new delights bring new cares; the claims of a growing family and a diminishing income are not to be gainsaid. The woollen trade failed to furnish support for two families; school teaching and the law were found to bring but small returns in Stratford. Often, at fireside conferences, the old dreams of

London are revived; but how make so rash a venture with wife and little ones? With womanly self-denial, it is Anne herself who urges the trial; she will remain at home until such time as the husband and father shall either return or bid them join him. Why should he hesitate when other Stratford men have won success? Did not Richard Field go to the big city as a printer's apprentice, and is he not now, after a few years, a great publisher? Are not Richard Burbage, Thomas Greene, and other fellow townsmen already famous as actors? Are not their gifts far less than his own? That lovely tale of *Venus and Adonis*, which has now become a long poem; those charming bits of plays which the occasional visits of London companies to the improvised stage of the Guildhall have impelled him to write—all of these he must take to London in his pocket. These will



QUEEN ELIZABETH IN SOLEMN PROCESSION GOING TO ST. PAUL'S CHURCH TO RETURN THANKS FOR THE
DEFEAT OF THE SPANISH ARMADA, NOVEMBER 24, 1588



make his fortune there; whether in poems or in plays, he need not fear to match himself even against the brilliant university wits of whom now and then they hear—of that she is quite sure.

Such logic of love added to press of poverty combine to give courage to one himself not without that consciousness of high powers which must always belong to genius, and on the sixth anniversary of his wedding day, William Shakespeare is alone in London. He has arrived just in time to see the Queen's solemn procession as it leaves Somerset House for St. Paul's, there to return thanks for the defeat of the Spanish Armada. He catches his first glimpse of that royal lady, who is said to love poets and their verses, and to welcome them to her court. She is seated on a highly decorated chariot throne drawn by richly caparisoned horses; she raises one ungloved hand

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

in blessing, while her adoring subjects lift up their voices in joyful acclamations. There too is the Earl of Essex, Master of the Horse, leading by the bridle the Horse of State; also Ladies of Honor, Privy Council, Prime Nobility, and Judges, all on horseback, with guards and domestics marching on foot. A splendid pageant truly! All London is rocking and roaring with Armada patriotism; all the talk is of sea fights and heroes; all the streets ring with ballads of Drake and Howard and Hawkins and Frobisher. But the unknown and unnoticed observer of all this splendor is sad at heart,—a homesick man, alone in a great city. As of old, it is in expression that he finds relief; as of old, his lines take the rhythm and metre inseparable from thoughts of his best beloved:

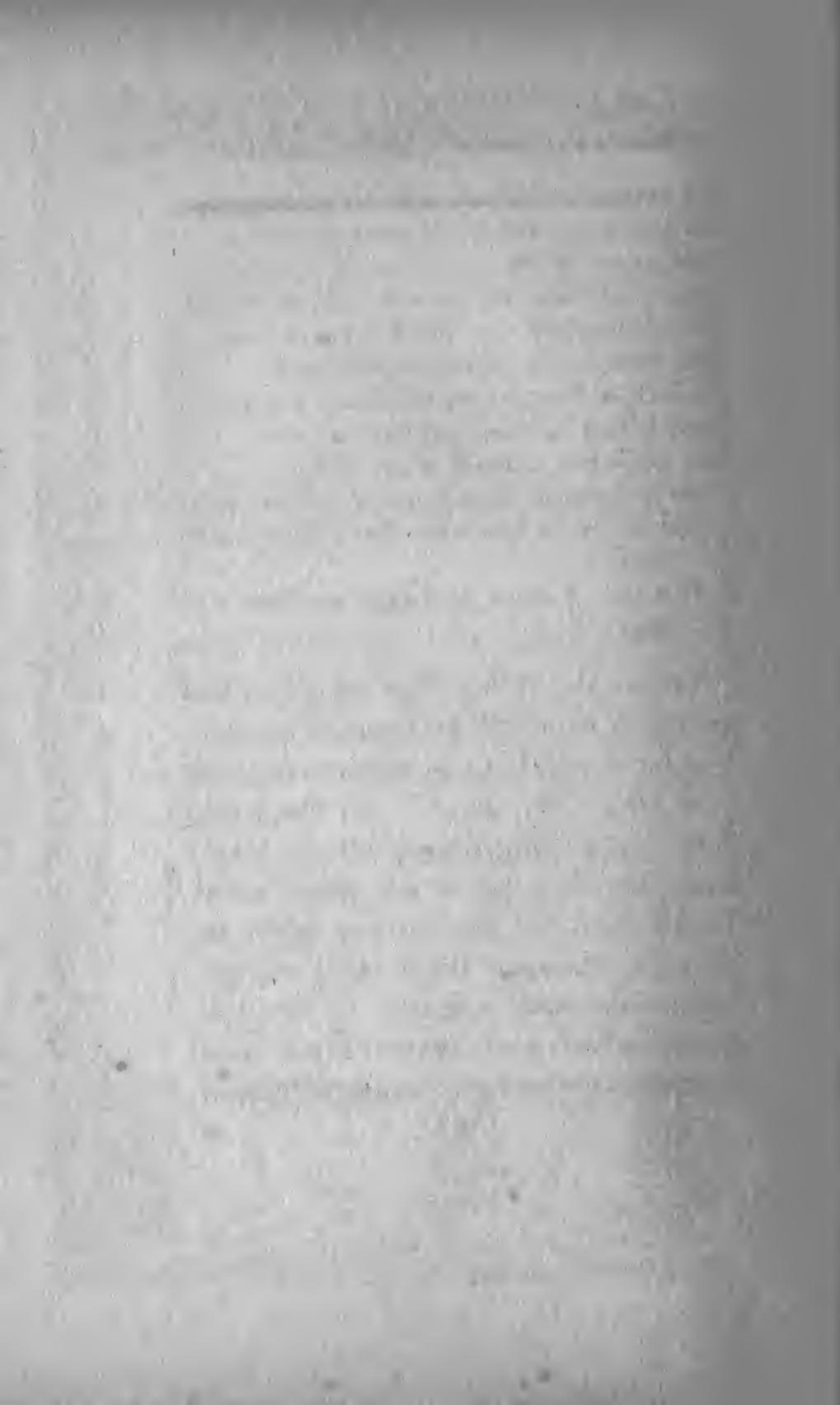
When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,



A LONDON BALLAD-SELLER

"What hast here? ballads?"

"Pray now, buy some: I love a ballad in print o' life, for then we are
sure they are true." — The Winter's Tale



SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth
brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with
kings.

On poems, rather than on plays, had the young man built his hopes of London. But he is not long in discovering that "the play's the thing." All the young poets are writing plays; all the young lords are flocking to see plays acted. To be sure the law frowns upon the players, classing them with rogues, vagabonds, and beggars; to avoid its penalties the poor player must enroll himself as the servant of some nobleman.



RIVER AVON
AT CHARLECOTE

However, the patron who protects a company and the poet who writes for it become often fast friends. That way success lies.

Forthwith he goes to the Blackfriars Theatre and joins the Earl of Leicester's company, finding congenial society in a little colony of his fellow townsmen already there. Small parts are given him for the stage; he does not despise them, since a man who would write plays must learn the art by first acting in them



OLD LOCK
ON RIVER AVON

himself. The money that he earns goes to Anne, who receives it not without lament at the manner of its earning. In her eyes he is all too good for such mean work, to which he replies:

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is
most dear,
Made old offences of affections new:
Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely: but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

And worse essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, have what shall have no end;
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confined.

Then give me welcome, next my heaven the
best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

Soon the odious calling of actor is dropped for the more congenial one of playwright. In less than two years his comedies have become so popular that the best poet of the day writes of him :

“He, the man whom Nature’s self had made,
To mock herself, and Truth to imitate.”

The most picturesque figure at Court, the Earl of Southampton, helps him both with purse and with praise, encouraging him to publish not only the long-withheld poem of *Venus and Adonis*, but a later one on the *Rape of Lucrece*. Even the Queen becomes eager to see these much-talked-of plays, and again



A GROUP OF LONDON AUTHORS OF THE XVI CENTURY
Sylvester, Selden, Beaumont (standing)
Camden, Earl of Dorset, Fletcher, Sir Francis Bacon (seated)



and again the Master of the Revels demands a new play, or an old one revised, to present before her Majesty at Christmas, or Twelfth Night, or other festival. Close personal friendships follow on artistic relations. He knows the bright spots and dark shadows in the careers of men like Southampton and William Herbert. Their experiences appeal to his poetic imagination so intensely as to seem almost his very own. He speaks for them in sonnets which, though well understood at the time, bring later some scandal to his own name. He lives the life of the creative artist, buoyed on the billows of success or sunk in the troughs of weariness and gloom. He meets court ladies, free of wit and sometimes of morals, and surrenders to their spell more than afterwards he is able to forgive himself. But always, restoration and healing come through his yearly visit to the



SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

*"Than whom a gentler
braver man,
His own delightful gen-
ius never feign'd,
Illustrating the vales
of Arcady
With courteous cour-
age and with loyal
loves."* — Southeby

Stratford home; the heart still rings true; the verse has lost none of its sincerity:

O, never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seem'd my flame to qualify,
As easy might I from myself depart
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie:
That is my home of love; if I have ranged,
Like him that travels I return again,
Just to the time, not with the time exchanged,
So that myself bring water for my stain:
Never believe, though in my nature reigned
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE

*"It is my father's will
I should take on me
The hostess-ship o' the
day. Reverendsirs,
For you there's rose-
mary and rue . . .
Grace and remem-
brance be to you."*
—The Winter's
Tale.



That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it, thou art my all.

The high hopes with which the Stratford youth went forth to seek fame and fortune are at last more than realized. At the end of twenty-one years he has written plays which fill the theatres and which all eagerly wish to read; he is the delight of all circles where wits meet or beauty shines; is known as the

"mellifluous and honey-tongued," the facile writer of "sugred Sonnets among his private friends." So highly gifted a being cannot fail to pass through, either in his own person or by sympathy, all of life's most searching experiences. More than commonly accessible is such an one to temptations of the senses, the heart, the imagination. Of such, many sonnets stand in confession. The way is long and not always pleasant to follow, nor is it necessary. That in the main his eye was fixed on the highest things, that at heart he was always true to love and home and family, he who runs may read. Before he has been ten years absent he has taken steps to restore the family fortune and to bring the name of Shakespeare back into local repute; has purchased a fine house, where wife and children await eagerly his annual visits; is always looking forward to his own final return to the peaceful fireside and



LONDON STREET-SINGERS

"This is a merry ballad, but a very pretty one."

"We can both sing it: if thou 'lt bear a part, thou shalt hear."

—The Winter's Tale.



the old friends in the dear town of his birth. Another decade of steady work and growing powers places him at the head of his profession; but his thought is less of new achievements and fresh triumphs than of the prospect of speedy reunion. The lines which herald his home-coming ring with all the old fervor of devotion and constancy:

Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods and to compounds
strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?
O, know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again, what is already spent,
For as the sun is daily new and old,
So is my love still telling what is told.



SHAKESPEARE WITH HIS FAMILY

Shakespeare reading one of his plays to wife and children:—
Susanna, the eldest daughter, and Hamnet and Judith, twins,
two years younger.

Thus was it that, while still in early middle life, with matchless powers still at their height and with the praises of his latest triumph in the great Roman play of *Antony and Cleopatra* still ringing in all ears, Shakespeare exchanged the plaudits of London for the placid state of a country gentleman in a small Warwickshire town.

Listen not, I pray you, to those subtle and ingenious critics who would have us believe that the most eloquent love poems



"NEW PLACE," GUILD CHAPEL, AND FALCON INN
Shakespeare's last home in Stratford. No print of the house as it was in Shakespeare's time exists; the front here shown dates from the following century.

in the English tongue were written by one man to another; still more, I pray you, listen not to those who aver that because Shakespeare lived many years away from his family in London and left by his will to his wife only a scant bequest that he loved her not; above all, listen not to those who hint that the man who created so many lovely and constant ladies — Juliet, Rosalind, Desdemona, Imogen, and the rest — had a wife of shrewish or jealous disposition.

SHAKESPEARE'S LOVE STORY

Every man — even the greatest — conceives of womanhood in the likeness of the women he has known best, — a mother, a sister, a wife, or perhaps some near friend. Whoever is wise in the lore of the heart may read between the lines what even the most astute of critics will miss; may see for himself, what was never doubted until more than a century after the author's death, that Shakespeare, in his sonnets, was a lover speaking to his beloved, and may learn from them more of the man's real self than is anywhere else possible.

*“I loved the man and do honour his memory, on
this side idolatry as much as any. He was, in-
deed, honest and of an open and free nature.”*

— BEN JONSON













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